

Historic Knutsford

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Historic Knutsford



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HISTORIC KNUTSFORD

THE ancient town of Knutsford, situated on the Cheshire plain sixteen miles from Manchester and twenty-four miles from Chester, has remained unspoilt by modernity. The chief street, King Street, has an old world and picturesque appearance with its protruding gables and its occasional black and white frontages. Many of the houses are very old, dating from 1697, 1701 and 1706. Originally places of residence, they have since been converted into shops, and several still retain fine oak staircases, quaint windows and panelled rooms.

Knutsford

The district was held by a Saxon—Erchbrand—at the time of the Norman Conquest, and Knottesford, or Cunetesford, seems to have been named after Knut, or Canute, who probably passed through the district in 1017.

King Canute

Knutsford has many attractions, being in the centre of the Cheshire hunting country, and surrounded by villages equally interesting. It used to be a famous cockfighting centre, also from the year 1729 to 1873 its racecourse was famous, and on racing days the county families used to drive in with their coaches and four or six.

*Cockfighting
and Racing*

It is worthy of note that Louis Napoleon (afterwards Napoleon III.) visited Knutsford about 1848, and honoured the landlord of the "Royal George" Hotel with his company on several occasions, and patronised several local tradesmen—Hickson, the saddler, and Slater, the breeches maker.

*Louis
Napoleon*

The "George" yard presented an animated appearance in the old coaching days, when the "Bangup" left at nine and travelled to Newcastle-under-Lyme for its next change of horses, Knutsford being the first change from Liverpool. The "Royal Mail" left Knutsford every morning at two and the "Umpire" every afternoon except Sunday at three-thirty.

*Coaching
Days*



Changing horses in the Royal George Hotel Coaching-yard.



The May Queen

THE crowning of the "May Queen" became a great attraction. At first it was a very simple ceremony, but it has grown to such vast proportions that on May Day it is not unusual for our own



An Early May Queen.

five to six thousand inhabitants to be swollen to thirty or forty thousand. Again, it has become, since Mrs. Gaskell was laid to rest in the graveyard of Brook Street Chapel in 1865, a place of pilgrimage to thousands of lovers of Mrs. Gaskell's works, especially as the original of her *Cranford* was Knutsford, and depicted life in this small country town about the year 1836.

The first record of a May Pole dance in these parts states that it was held at Rostherne in the sixteenth century; much to the annoyance of Vicar Adam Martindale, that his wife took a framing saw and cut down the pole.

Rural England

Most lovers of rural England are familiar with the Elizabethan half-timbered buildings, but where else can such a fine collection of magnificent old halls and mansions be found than within a short radius of Knutsford. A short motor run brings one to Moreton Hall (1550-1559), one of the finest examples of Elizabethan architecture.

Half Timbered Churches

There are also many picturesque churches in the neighbourhood, but one of the most interesting, and at the same time one of the easiest to reach from Knutsford, is Lower Peover. It is one of the very few old black and white churches, and lies about three or four miles from Knutsford; the walk across Toft Park is extremely delightful.

Appeal to Artists

The artist in search of the picturesque needs go no farther than the old coachway of the "Royal George," but a stroll through the quaint old town—where the ancient jostles the modern—will provide him with all the material he could desire.

KNUTSFORD has been associated with a number of celebrated highwaymen. Dick Turpin committed a robbery in Newbridge Hollow (that is on the main road from Manchester to Chester, near to what is called Lymm turning, where the River Bollin runs under the road), and afterwards rode so fast across country to the Kilton Inn at Hoo Green, four miles away, and called attention to the hour on his arrival, that when the investigating officers learned of his time of arrival they considered it impossible that he could have perpetrated the crime.

Dick
Turpin

Harrison Ainsworth's *Rookwood* relates the narrative, and it is of interest that Ainsworth's father was buried at Rostherne, in which parish Knutsford was only a Chapelry until 1744.

Higgins, "The Highwayman" of *De Quincey*, lived at Heath House. He was truly a gentleman of the road, and married the daughter of a Cheshire squire. He went out at night to "collect his rents," made himself busy in the homes of his hunting hosts, committed many robberies, and eventually a murder at Bristol, for which he paid the extreme penalty at Carmarthen in 1767. Two of his children are buried in the churchyard.

Edward
Higgins

On one occasion, Higgins had noted particularly the diamonds and other jewels of Lady Warburton at the County Assembly held at the "George," and leaving early and mounting his horse he took up his station near Arley, five miles away, and would have held up the family coach had not Lady Warburton, recognising him, called out "Good-night, Mr. Higgins! Why did you leave the ball so early?"



The terror of the traveller.

KNUTSFORD was the "Hollingford" of *Wives and Daughters*; the "Duncombe" of *Mrs. Harrison's Confessions*; the "Eltham" of *Cousin Phillis*; the "Hamley" of *A Dark Night's Work*; and the "Barford" of *The Squire's Story*.

The "George" is mentioned by Mrs. Gaskell in many of her stories. In *Cranford*, Signor Brunoni performed his wonderful tricks at the Assembly Room at the "George," which had been added to the inn about a hundred years before by the different county families who met together there once a month during the winter to dance and play at cards." Miss Pole "strolled" into the "George" in search of her glove and incidentally for any information she might glean of the mysterious Signor Brunoni.

Miss Matty's tea shop is now a chemists, being situated in the upper street opposite to the entrance of the George Hotel yard. In this curious Assembly Room, with its massive chandeliers and its tiny musicians' gallery, we can, in imagination, see Miss Matty and Miss Forrester "bridle" up as they enter and "walk mincingly up the room."

In *Wives and Daughters*, it was the "George" to which Roger Hamley ran in order to catch the London coach when Ruth caught a glimpse of him from the attic of what is now called Hollingford House.

In *A Dark Night's Work*, which is issued with *Cousin Phillis* in the Knutsford edition of Mrs. Gaskell's works, Edward Wilkins attended the Hamley Assembly which was so exclusive "that the old original subscribers would fain have had a man prove his sixteen quarterings before he might make his bow to the queen of the night." To him, the ballroom at the "George" in his native town was a place more grand and more awful than the most magnificent salons he had seen in Paris or Rome.



Signor Brunoni at the Assembly.

KNUTSFORD is almost entirely residential. At the present time the Cheshire hounds meet upon two days a week within easy reach of Knutsford, and there is no prettier sight than a Meet at the gates of Tatton Park, the residence of the Lord Egerton of Tatton, and perhaps the largest enclosed park in England. There is ample stabling to be hired for a term for hunters or hacks, at the "George."

*Sporting
Facilities*

Knutsford is an ideal centre for motoring, being in the heart of Cheshire which is famed for its excellent roads.

Again, Knutsford being situated on the main road north and south is a favourite resting place. Many people break their journey at this old world town, and for those who take two days on a motor journey, Knutsford seems to offer an ideal "half-way" station.

*Halting
Place*

Knutsford is well served with railway and motor 'bus services to near by towns and cities, and many visitors, both commercial and professional, take advantage of this—after busy and tiring days they find the quiet of Knutsford conducive to refreshing repose.

Accessibility

The Cheshire Lines Railway from Manchester to Chester caters for railway traffic, whilst the North Western Motor 'Bus service links up with Northwich, Altrincham, Manchester, Warrington, Wigan, and various outlying districts. Knutsford is also a connecting point for the North to London Motor Coaches.

The quaint custom of sanding the streets is still practised in Knutsford on holidays and carnival days. Its origin is very doubtful. Green says it is a sinister reminder on happy days that our origin was dust! Others say it dates back to the time when King Canute's army forded the Lily at "Canute's ford," then sat down and brushed the sand from their feet.

*Sanding
the
Streets*

THE HISTORIC ROYAL GEORGE HOTEL.

*Royal
Visitors*

THE George Inn, as it used to be simply called, or the "Royal George" as it became known after the visit of the Duchess of Kent and the young Princess Victoria, is an ancient hostelry in the centre of old-world Knutsford.

*The
Building
and
Old
Staircase*

The "Royal George" Hotel has an ancient appearance with its old coachway and ample out-buildings to provide stabling and garage. The interior is still more interesting, with its wide oak staircase at the head of which are to be found one of the many ancient clocks, a black shining old oak table and a few chairs artistically carved. The house is roomy and comfortable, with many excellent rooms in which can be found scarce examples of old English furniture.

The "Royal George" Hotel is not only old-world, it has been improved by the introduction of up-to-date conveniences of a modern hotel, but still retains the glories of the old coaching inn. Among the rooms there are several of historical interest. The Queen Victoria bedroom is the actual room in which the Princess Victoria slept on the occasion of her visit to the "George" with the Duchess of Kent, and much of the original furniture has been preserved.

*Dancing
and
Music*

Dinner and tea dances are provided at week-ends, and guests dance to the Hotel's Royal Georgeian Dance Orchestra. The "Royal George" is the ideal place for a sojourn and for those who wish to get away from the anxieties of present-day life in towns.

Christmas Festivities at the Royal George Hotel attract people from every part of the country—no finer setting for Yuletide revels can be imagined.



The Queen Victoria Bedroom.

THERE are many pleasant walks in the immediate vicinity and there is much to interest one in the Hotel itself. Not the least interesting of the antiquities to be found at the "Royal George" is the oak bureau, anent which a memorandum from Professor Geoffrey Callender, M.A., F.S.A., of the Department of History, Royal Naval College, Greenwich, London, S.E. 10, is very illuminating.

Antiquities

This eminent authority on Lord Nelson dwells at length on an inscription "H.N. 1790—Victory," and finds evidence to support his conjecture that the bureau belonged to Lord Nelson in the year 1790, and that he had engraved upon the lock the inscription "H.N. 1790." "The letter 'N' for Nelson and the figure '7' look very much as though they had been written by Nelson himself. The 'N' is almost unmistakable—the capital 'V' tells a tale of its own. It is exactly the kind of 'V' that Nelson made before he lost his right arm."

The Round Room in the Royal George Hotel is always an interesting spectacle to visitors. As its name implies it is perfectly round, and door, window and genuine Adams fireplace fit beautifully in the curved walls. It is a truly wonderful room.

*The
Round
Room*

The Royal George Hotel is proud of its amenities—it is replete with every modern convenience and equipment. A carefully chosen staff assures the guests of a willing service, and in all modernising, without detracting from the old world appearance, comfort of guests has been the first care. This, backed by new and modern kitchens and an excellent cellar, account for "the subtle atmosphere of the Royal George Hotel" which so irresistibly attracts the visitor of taste.

Besides the ballroom, there is a large assembly room capable of holding about 180 people, used for dinners, receptions, &c.

*The
Ballroom*

There is an air of gentility about the house and the sporting prints carry one back to a long past age.

*Tariff and general information for the
use of guests will be gladly
sent on request.*

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